Fourth World Conference on

women

Action for Equality,
Development and Peace

Beijing, China
4-15 September

1995

Thousands of women and men from around the world will meet in Beijing in September 1995 for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Participants will assess how women's lives have changed over the past decade and take steps to keep issues of concern to women high on the international agenda.

Moving into the twenty-first century, the drive for women's rights has accelerated and taken on powerful and global momentum. In the 20 years since the first UN conference on women, the campaign for equality between women and men has witnessed momentous changes and undeniable advances:

◆ Women are entering the labour market in unprecedented numbers and pursuing a greater role at all levels of public life;

◆ Governments have adopted major legislation that promises women equal opportunities, equal treatment and respect for their rights;

◆ Thanks to pressure at all levels, women are increasingly gaining crucial access to proper health care, education and civil justice;

◆ Women's heightened awareness of their common problems has provoked a determined mobilization to fight discrimination and persistent injustices.

But just how much have these advances improved the life of the average woman? And, in view of the sustained social and economic crises facing much of the world today, just how deep is the commitment of Governments to eliminate discrimination against women?

The Fourth World Conference on Women will attempt to answer some of these questions. It will also assess the progress and the shortfalls of the past two decades, and identify action to be taken.

Goals of the Conference

◆ To adopt a "Platform for Action". This document, an agenda for women's empowerment, concentrates on 12 "critical areas of concern". These are areas identified as obstacles to the advancement of women in the world. The Platform offers corresponding strategic objectives and action to be taken by Governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the private sector for the removal of the existing obstacles.

◆ To determine the priority actions to be taken for the advancement of women by the international community, including the United Nations system.

◆ To mobilize women and men at both the policy-making and grass-roots levels to achieve those objectives.

From Mexico City to Beijing

So far, there have been three United Nations world conferences on women.

The first conference, held during International Women's Year in Mexico City, 1975, adopted a Plan of Action that led to the declaration, by the United

Nations General Assembly, of the United Nations Decade for Women. In 1979 the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which to date has 139 States parties. A committee of independent experts reviews the implementation of the Convention, discusses reports submitted and makes recommendations to Governments for further improvement. These activities demonstrate the commitment of Governments to bring about positive change.

At the second conference, held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1980, a Programme of Action for the Second Half of the Decade for Women was adopted, with emphasis on education, employment and health.

The third world conference took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985, to review and appraise achievements made and obstacles encountered during the Decade for Women. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 were adopted by consensus. The Strategies provided a framework for action at the national, regional and international levels to promote empowerment of women and their enjoyment of human rights.

A 1990 evaluation of the Forward-looking Strategies by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women revealed that the world community had become more conscious of and sensitive to issues affecting women. However, there seemed to be some loss of momentum in implementation.

The Fourth World Conference on Women aims to rekindle this momentum and focus on new issues, such as violence against women, including the issue of sexual harassment, which have been placed on the global agenda.

Mobilizing for Beijing

In December 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali appointed Gertrude Mongella, a former cabinet minister and diplomat from Tanzania, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Her office and the Division for the Advancement of Women of the UN Secretariat are responsible for organizing the Conference and preparing its documents. The UN Commission on the Status of Women is the Preparatory Committee for the Conference.

The Commission, established in 1946, is an intergovernmental body consisting of 45 Member States, which meets annually. It is responsible for for-

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mulating global policies and recommendations for the advancement of women. The final preparatory meeting of the Commission, held from 15 March to 7 April 1995 in New York, approved the draft Platform for Action and decided to transmit it to Beijing for adoption at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

National preparations

Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people from all walks of life have been involved in the preparations for the Beijing Conference at national, regional and international levels. National committees set up by Governments and NGOs have reviewed the status of women in their respective countries, analysed the draft Platform for Action and adopted their own recommendations. The national reports submitted by Governments and NGOs formed the basis of the Second Review

and Appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000, a key UN document to be presented in Beijing.

The issues were further reviewed and re-examined at the regional level in five regional preparatory meetings held under the auspices of the United Nations Regional Economic Commissions: in Jakarta, Indonesia, for Asia and the Pacific, 7-14 June 1994; in Mar del Plata, Argentina, for Latin America and the Caribbean, 25-29 September 1994; in Vienna, Austria, for Europe and North America, 17-21 October 1994; in Amman, Jordan, for Arab countries, 6-10 November 1994; and in Dakar, Senegal, for Africa, 16-23 November 1994.

To encourage youths to become involved in the Conference and its preparatory process, each regional meeting was preceded by a youth consultation. Inclusion of youth as members of delegations has also been recommended to Member States and NGOs by the Conference Secretariat.

NGO Forum on Women '95

In September 1995, when women and men around the world gather in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women, many of them will represent NGOs. They will be there to participate, from 30 August to 8 September, in the NGO Forum on Women '95, a parallel meeting of non-governmental representatives. To be held under the auspices of the NGO Forum Planning Committee, the event is expected to bring together about 35,000 women and men from around the world. In preparation for the Forum, regional NGO Forums and Consultations were held prior to each UN regional and global preparatory meeting.

The NGO Forum on Women '95 has two goals: to influence the Platform for Action and to hold a substantive and celebratory forum highlighting women's vision and strategy for the world in the twenty-first century. The theme chosen for the Forum is "Look at the world through women's eyes".

Eligibility for participation

The Women's Conference in Beijing is an intergovernmental meeting convened by the United Nations. In addition to UN member States, participants and observers will include organizations of the UN system, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and those NGOs accredited by the Commission on the Status of Women.

NGO Forum on Women '95 is open to all. Participants are required to pre-register with the NGO Forum Planning Committee.

Media accreditation

The Fourth World Conference on Women will be held at Beijing International Convention Centre. The Conference site will have a Media Centre with transmission facilities. Representatives of the media interested in becoming accredited to the Conference may write to the Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit of the Department of Public Information, United Nations, Room S-250, New York, NY 10017, USA; Fax: 212-963-4642.

For more information, contact:

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